

Promised Things by playswithworms

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Summary:

Hopper worries over El. Hopper and Joyce talk about their kids. Everyone is very tired. El tries to explain, and Hopper makes a promise.

Promised Things

Author's Note:

The relationship between Hopper and El gives me all the feels! So here's one more "what happened after El closed the gate" fic :)

"El? El, c'mon sweetheart. Dammit dammit dammit."

She wanted to answer, but she couldn't move, couldn't force her eyes open. It felt like she was at the bottom of a very deep hole, too tired to speak, too tired to weep. Big calloused hands kept patting gently at her face, though, and at the desperate concern in them she managed to make a sort of garbled "buh" sound.

"There ya are kid, there ya are," the voice said, full of relief. Hopper. Hop. El swallowed, choked, and felt herself lifted and tilted forward, a rough cloth pressed against her face and nose. There was sticky wetness on her face, down her neck, clammy dampness on her shirt...she brushed at it weakly.

"You're ok, you're ok." He sounded like he was trying to reassure himself as much as anything. "You've got the mother of all nosebleeds though. Dammit. Knew I shouldn't have left you alone."

One hand cupped the back of her head while the other firmly pinched the bottom of her nose shut with the cloth. She leaned into it, breathing through her mouth, and managed to crack one eye open, blearily taking in her surroundings, worn leather seats, fogged windows blurring the lights of Hawkins Lab, the brighter flashing of assorted emergency vehicles. Truck. They were in Hop's truck. She didn't remember getting here; her last memory was of Hopper carrying her through the lab, of feeling vague worry at the way he staggered with weariness as he walked but knowing she had nothing left, no way to help him. Batteries, drained, and then some, and he was not doing much better. What she could see of his face now was drawn tight with exhaustion and worry as he tilted her head back up after a few minutes and removed the cloth from her nose. She swallowed again, squinting her eyes shut at the sudden pain in her

raw throat, tasting blood. She felt cold and a little sick and so very tired.

"Think it's slowin' down," Hop said, putting the cloth back to her face, "but if it doesn't stop soon I'm getting you to a doctor."

"No," she protested, the word sounding strange with her nose squeezed closed again.

Hopper made a worried exhale, his free hand ruffling her hair. "Sorry, kid, I'm not gonna let you save all our asses and then bleed to death in my truck, you hear me?"

"I'm okay," she tried to say, but Hop must have only heard the "okay" part, because he chuckled.

"Good," Hop rumbled softly. "Nice to know you can be cooperative once in awhile."

El sighed a little in frustration, but didn't have the energy to correct him. She wished she had some water for her raw throat, to rinse away the taste of blood. Breathing through her mouth like this was drying it out. I'm a mouth breather now, she thought, knowing full well that it was what Hop called a 'figure of speech,' that the words didn't actually mean what they sounded like. It was funny though. She'd have to tell Mike. She felt tears well up at thought of him. He was safe, and Lucas and Dustin and hopefully Will would be ok now, too, since the Shadow Monster couldn't reach him anymore. She'd come back in time, they'd done it, her and Hop, the gate was closed.

Hopper carefully took the cloth away again. "That's better," he said, smiling, although the rest of his expression was more of a wince as he gently turned her head a little. "Jesus, kid, you're even bleeding from your ears. You hearing me ok?"

El nodded, eyes closing, seeing the Shadow Monster again behind her eyelids as it roared at her, enraged, as she forced it back. It knew her now, and it was...very angry. Well. She could be angry too. Hop was asking more questions, still worried, but she was sinking fast, back to the dark. Something warm was placed over her, and then the truck was moving, they were driving, away...away from the lab, going

home...home....

.....

"Nah, she was pullin' her punches. Just threw some furniture around. Broke every window in the place, though, you should have seen it! The little shit." Hopper's voice sounded almost proud. El registered the fact that she was warm, and safe, and she really didn't want to open her eyes just yet. Her whole body ached with weariness.

"Stuck in a cabin with no one but you for a year, who can blame her? I'd have broken a few windows myself."

"Hey! I really fucked up though, that whole thing. Said some pretty awful things to her. God, Joyce, how could I have been so stupid?"

"You were both under a lot of stress, Hop, couldn't have been easy for you, either."

"I know, I know, but...supposed to be the grown up, y'know? I can get damn creative with an Eggo, got that going for me now at least. God, what am I doing? What the hell am I even doing? What did you do, when Jonathan got to this age?"

"I don't know, Hop. Jonathan...Jonathan never really got to that age."

"What, no teenage rebellion, no sneaking out to parties and screaming that he hates you when you tell him no?"

"I don't know what to tell you. He...cooks breakfast. He gets good grades and took that job to help out with the money. He takes care of Will, oh god, he's such a good big brother. I think, after his dad left...he grew up so fast. It wasn't fair, but, I'm so proud of him. So fuckin' proud." There was slightly tearful laughter. "I don't know what I did to deserve these kids. I mean, don't get me wrong, they're both *kids*, I'm not saying they're perfect, but..."

"Yeah, well, I suspect their mom has something to do with how they turned out."

Eleven took a deeper breath and blinked her eyes open slowly to see Joyce curled up in a blanket in an armchair, Hop slouched on the floor next to it, both of them looking ragged and tired.

"Flatterer." Joyce nudged Hopper's shoulder with a foot. "You, too. I know you. You'll do fine, even if you do fuck up now and then. Anyway, there's only so much you can do, even the ones that aren't able to..." Joyce waved a hand, "throw you through a window with their minds, or whatever. I saw how you were with her. She trusts you. Being a dad, like riding a bike, right?"

Hopper chuckled, running a hand over his face. El let her eyes drift shut again, but not before she saw that stunned sadness in his eyes as he stared down at the floor, the same look that had been there when he'd told her about Sara. His little girl, who was gone.

"I don't know about that trust thing. I keep...I keep breaking my promises. And what kind of dad would send his kid to go fight hell monsters? She walked back into that place like...she could have died down there. She did so good, you should have seen her. She fucking gave everything, Joyce. Closing that gate. Fuckin' everything. And then I found her like that, all covered in blood, and for a minute I thought....I don't know what I would have done if I'd lost her."

"Welcome to the club," Joyce murmured. "But what was the alternative? Let that...that *thing* kill the whole town? How far would it have gone? And Will..." Joyce's voice wavered a little.

"I know, I know. She's no ordinary kid. Trust me *I know*. There was a moment though, when I was ready to take her and just...run. Just go...anywhere, far enough away if it would keep her safe, to hell with anyone else."

"Kids make you stupid."

Hopper barked a short laugh. "Yeah. You said it."

"Wouldn't change it, though."

"Nope."

Their voices were starting to sound sleepy, there was a long silence,

but El heard Hopper take a long breath after a moment. She cracked an eye open to see him standing up, pulling himself slowly vertical by leaning heavily on Joyce's armchair.

Joyce made a moaning sound of protest. "Hop, no, you were out all night, they can manage without you for awhile. Have you slept at all? Go lie down, you can use Will's bed if you want."

"Don't get your panties in a twist, m'not goin' anywhere, just need to stretch. Think we should try to wake her? It's been almost thirteen hours." Hop turned his head and he blinked, meeting her eyes, and his face cracked into a wide weary smile. "Or hey. Look who's up! How're you feelin', kiddo?"

El pulled an arm that felt like it weighed a hundred pounds out of her blankets and rubbed at her eyes as Hop came over, trying to wake up enough to respond. Joyce got up, too, and felt her forehead and then kissed it, like she did with Will, which was nice. Like maybe Mama would have done, if she hadn't been hurt by the bad men. Which reminded her.

"Will?" El asked, her voice no more than a whispering croak. Her throat felt like it was on fire.

"He's right here, sweetheart." El turned her head a little to see Will, wrapped in a blanket on the other end of the couch where she was, sound asleep. "He's fine, he's going to be just fine, thanks to you. He'll be so excited to meet you when he wakes up, the boys told him all about you."

"How're you doin', kid," Hopper asked again, kneeling down next to the couch so he was closer to eye level. "Had me kind of worried." The lines on Hop's face and around his eyes seemed deeper than ever, and Joyce was looking down at her, too, her eyes so sad behind her kind smile. El, staring back at them both, felt her eyes well up with tears, for no reason she could explain.

"That bad, huh? C'mere," Hopper scooped her up, blankets and all, and sat on the couch so she was propped against him. She burrowed her face into his shoulder, letting the hot tears trickle into his shirt, breathing in the scent of cigarettes and sweat. "Anything hurt,

anywhere?"

El sniffled and snuggled in closer, taking stock. Everything ached, and her nose felt stuffy, either from crying or from all the bleeding from before, but nothing seemed actually damaged, just tired-hurt. Her mind felt...torn, ripped open from the force she'd expended against the Shadow Monster, but she could feel power filling up the new raw spaces. It felt like she could step into the Void now with just a breath, no blindfold needed, and find anyone, all of her...family. She closed her eyes and just like that, she could see Mike slumped in his desk at school, Lucas nudging Dustin, who had nodded off completely.

"El?" Hopper squeezed her a little and she pulled herself back with an effort, head spinning. That had probably been stupid, but now at least she knew they were ok, too.

"Just here," she whispered, touching her throat, so she could tell Hop something that he'd understand.

"Your throat hurts?" El nodded. "I'll bet, actually. That was one hell of a scream you let loose with down there. Think my ears are still ringing."

"I'll get you some water, sweetheart," Joyce said, giving her shoulder an affectionate rub and squeeze before she got up.

The cool water helped, she gulped the whole glass thirstily. The sausages and the Eggos with whipped cream helped, too, although they hurt a little to swallow, but they chased away the last of the dried-blood taste in her mouth, and her head stopped spinning once there was something in her stomach. ("You deserve *all* the Eggos, honey, as many as you want," Joyce told her, while Hopper made grumbling sounds about spoiling her rotten that didn't sound like he really meant it and stole bits of her whipped cream.)

"Mike?" she asked, when she was done, leaning back into Hop's side on the couch. She knew *where* he was, but not how he was.

"School day, kid. Woulda looked too suspicious for all of 'em to be out of school again, had too many of those as it is. And his parents

were gettin' suspicious. Had to pry him away from you with a crowbar, though."

"Crowbar?"

"Figure of speech," Hop said, in his teaching voice. "Crowbar's a kind of tool, that you use to pull things apart that don't want to let go. Means he didn't want to leave you. You can bet he'll be here soon as school's out."

El smiled and yawned, letting her head rest on Hop's shoulder, eyes drifting shut. "Mike," she said again, just to say his name.

"Yeah, yeah, Mike. Don't know what you see in the kid."

"Mike Wheeler is a very nice boy, Hop," Joyce said in a slightly scolding tone. "He's been such a good friend to Will. I think it's very sweet, El honey, how much he cares about you."

Hopper made a rumbling noise, somewhere down in his chest.

"He found me in the storm," El offered softly, into Hop's shoulder, searching for the right words, wondering how to explain. "Mike. He saved me. I didn't...I didn't have enough words, but he listened. He listened so hard. He said I could be El, for short, and he told me about promises, and friends don't lie, and the Snow Ball." He hadn't kept that promise, but that hadn't been Mike's fault; she was the one that went away. "I opened the gate, I was the monster, but...Mike said no. That I'd saved him, that I wasn't the monster."

"El...You. Are NOT. A monster." Hopper's voice was fierce. "Who called you a monster? I'll kill 'em, I swear."

"I killed," El said sadly, opening her eyes to look up at him. "They were bad men, but I killed them." Hop clenched his jaw, looking almost like he was about to cry. El put her head back down on his shoulder. "Not the last one, I didn't kill him. I'm trying to be a good monster," she said softly.

"Dammit, kid." Hop squeezed her closer and pressed a kiss to the top of her head. He was quiet a long moment, clearing his throat a few times. Eleven felt sleep dragging at her again.

"So, this...Snow Ball," Hop said finally, his voice sounding a little odd and raspy. "That's that middle school thing? The dance?"

El nodded. "Mike asked if I wanted to go, but I couldn't be his sister because that would be weird."

Hopper snorted a little. "That's comin' up in a month or so, isn't it?" he asked Joyce.

El pushed up off of his shoulder, blinking at him, suddenly feeling wide awake. "There's another one?"

"Another one? Yeah, well...yeah. They do it every year. Now, don't look at me like that," Hop warned, looking a little alarmed, and El sank back down on the couch, trying not to look...however he thought she was looking. "We still gotta keep a low profile, whole town's stirred up like a hornet's nest, but..."

El hugged her knees, heart beating hard. "But?" she said in her smallest voice, peering at Hop over the top of her knees, hardly daring to breathe.

"Hop, c'mon," Joyce said, her eyes pleading. "There's gotta be some way...I mean, c'mon."

Hopper ran a hand through his hair, down his face, and then pointed sternly at El. "No promises, ok? I am not promising anything. But. I will see what I can do. Ok?"

"Ok," El whispered, eyes wide. There were a lot of people at a dance, she knew that much. It would be risky, it would be stupid, but she wanted to go so much she thought she might explode. Mike would be so happy. She frowned as another thought struck her. "I don't have a dress." Nancy's dress, the pink one, had met its sad demise as cleaning rags last year after surviving a journey to the Upside Down and a month of hard living in the woods.

"A dress?" Hopper shook his head. "A dress'll be the easy part, don't worry about the dress, kid."

"I can help you find a dress, honey, don't worry," Joyce added.

"Puffed sleeves?" El said hopefully, remembering the stories that Hop had read her when she first went to live with him in the cabin. There was so much she didn't understand, but she remembered the dress with puffed sleeves.

"What?"

"Puffed sleeves, like...in the story..."

"Like in Anne of Green Gables?" Hopper laughed a little, rubbing his forehead. Joyce gave them both a funny look, eyebrows high, and mouthed the title, grinning. "You are something else kid. Somethin' else." He reached over and El returned happily to where she was before, snuggled warm against his side, like it was home. He wrapped an arm around her and ruffled her hair. "Puffed sleeves. Hm. Well I sure as hell ain't no Matthew Cuthbert, but...I'll do my best. I can promise you that, kid. I'll do my best."

Author's Note:

Ok, so Eleven's dress for the Snow Ball didn't have giant puffed sleeves or anything, but they were at least a little bit puffy? That's my headcanon, and I'm stickin' to it anyway! Here's an excerpt from the book, for those who've never read Anne of Green Gables - I can imagine it might have resonated with El, even if she only had the vaguest idea of what puffed sleeves even were, lol:

"Oh, I can see you don't like the dresses! What is the matter with them? Aren't they neat and clean and new?"

"Yes."

"Then why don't you like them?"

"They're--they're not--pretty," said Anne reluctantly.

"Pretty!" Marilla sniffed. "I didn't trouble my head about getting pretty dresses for you. I don't believe in pampering vanity, Anne, I'll tell you that right off. Those dresses are good, sensible, serviceable dresses, without

any frills or furbelows about them, and they're all you'll get this summer. The brown gingham and the blue print will do you for school when you begin to go. The sateen is for church and Sunday school. I'll expect you to keep them neat and clean and not to tear them. I should think you'd be grateful to get most anything after those skimpy wincey things you've been wearing."

"Oh, I am grateful," protested Anne. "But I'd be ever so much graterfuller if--if you'd made just one of them with puffed sleeves. Puffed sleeves are so fashionable now. It would give me such a thrill, Marilla, just to wear a dress with puffed sleeves."

"Well, you'll have to do without your thrill. I hadn't any material to waste on puffed sleeves. I think they are ridiculous-looking things anyhow. I prefer the plain, sensible ones."

"But I'd rather look ridiculous when everybody else does than plain and sensible all by myself," persisted Anne mournfully.

"Trust you for that! Well, hang those dresses carefully up in your closet, and then sit down and learn the Sunday school lesson. I got a quarterly from Mr. Bell for you and you'll go to Sunday school tomorrow," said Marilla, disappearing downstairs in high dudgeon.

Anne clasped her hands and looked at the dresses.

"I did hope there would be a white one with puffed sleeves," she whispered disconsolately. "I prayed for one, but I didn't much expect it on that account. I didn't suppose God would have time to bother about a little orphan girl's dress. I knew I'd just have to depend on Marilla for it. Well, fortunately I can imagine that one of them is of snow-white muslin with lovely lace frills and three-puffed sleeves."

Anne of Green Gables, chapter 11